



October 13, 2026

Cincinnati Public Schools
P.O. Box 5381
Cincinnati, OH 45201-5381

Dear Superintendent Shauna Murphy and President Brandon Craig,

Thank you for your email on September 21 regarding your decision to keep the levy on the ballot in 2026.

First of all, we want to offer our sincere congratulations on the progress CPS made in this year's State Report Card. While moving to three stars is an important indication of progress, we also share your perspective that there is more work to be done.

We also want to commend you for the progress on the Strategic Plan document. Since our previous letter, we were encouraged by the unanimous vote supporting the Strategic Plan, and the specific goals articulated in the plan. Our hope is to continue our collaboration as you work to implement the Strategic Plan.

We believe an outcomes-focused CPS—with a strategic plan guided by metrics and data and a fiscally responsible budget that prioritizes investments that improve student achievement—can improve outcomes for students and families.

Since our letter to you, and following your reply, we have continued to consider the matter of the 7-mill new-money property tax levy that the CPS Board placed on the ballot this November. We continue to believe this is an ill-advised levy both from an amount and timing perspective.

We believe the district would be better served by taking the time to more clearly outline the case and spending plan for this significant new investment, work with stakeholders to build alignment around investment priorities, and build a robust coalition in support of a levy. In Cincinnati, successful new money levies have consistently taken this approach, and the result has been longer-term community support and trust.

We have three significant concerns about Issue 4:

- The District has not clearly created or shared its plan for spending this new money or re-aligning the current budget to make significant investments in the strategic plan. In your letter to us, you stated the Board “will determine how new revenue is spent through our public budget process.” That future process won’t happen until after the election. Parents, taxpayers and other stakeholders deserve to know before they vote how the district will invest \$66 million dollars in new money. To be clear: we recognize that CPS needs to be appropriately funded to serve students and that could require a new levy. However, we believe that the District should more broadly engage with the community, have a specific plan for how it will spend this new money, and transparently share it with voters and the public.
- The District’s decision to set the levy at 7-mills could limit economic growth in our region. The 7-mill new property tax will push the overall CPS property tax bill to \$4,460 for an owner of a \$300,000 home—adding \$735 per year. But property taxes don’t just affect homeowners. They ripple through the entire economy, affecting small business owners who own or lease property, businesses that might be choosing where to locate new jobs, renters who will be forced to absorb the increased property taxes via rent increases, and senior citizens whose fixed incomes will be further stressed by a new money levy. The District’s decision to seek one of the largest new money property tax requests in recent memory raises legitimate concerns about competitiveness and affordability at a time when the City is working to attract residents, employers, investment, and jobs.
- CPS has not yet completed a facilities master plan. That plan should inform a new-money levy, not be as a result of it. While board members have alluded to the need to review facilities and Bellwether has referred to “portfolio rightsizing” and the need for a 4-year facilities plan, this work has not yet been done. Yet, in meetings with us, you have acknowledged the potential need to also pursue an additional new levy for facilities and potentially close school buildings, regardless of whether the levy passes. The CPS board should be more transparent with voters on these issues before asking them to substantially increase property taxes.

For these reasons, our organizations cannot be supportive of Issue 4.

Our organizations have supported new money CPS levies in the past, including our partnership to develop and pass the Preschool Promise levy in 2016. As you have seen with our work supporting SORTA/Metro, Hamilton County Great Parks, the Cincinnati Futures Commission, and this year’s Children’s Services levy, the business community is willing to engage with important community partners to help develop and pass responsible levies that include a transparent plan for investment, a broad coalition of supporters, and a measured and fiscally responsible approach to the ask.

Our hope remains that you will choose to pause your effort to seek a levy this year and instead work with a broad coalition of stakeholders to create a transparent and right-sized plan for new public investment in CPS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brendon Cull".

Brendon Cull
President & CEO
Cincinnati Regional Chamber

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Z. Lindgren".

Gary Z. Lindgren
President
CBC/CRBC